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THE MORNING PROGRAM

Burko-E-0 would zap in that tape cartridge and Zongo's favorite word all but blew apart the smaller idiot boxes that flashed along the beaches of the fetid bayfront city: "Zongo-0-0-0!" reverberated and overlapped, finally ending in a screeching crescendo followed by maniacal drumming.

Then Zongo, the dj, would scream his second favorite word "UnEARTHly!" and Burko-E-0, his only engineer ever, would collapse back into his battered, springless, "executive" chair and wheel around the control room bumping into everything until he reached his coffee mug, half a hollowed-out softball lined with a ceramic something and secured by a handle made from driftwood and macrame. The mug was a gift from a fan of Morning Lunacy, celebrating the station's last place finish in the Radio-TV league--as did Burko-E-0's t-shirt, which featured him

leaning back at an impossible angle in the springless chair while holding up the Morning Lunacy pennant.

Over frosted mugs of Pabst Blue-Ribbon of a blinding afternoon at the palm-roofed, screenless Beachbum Cafe dwarfed by stucco hotels--

Zongo: We cause the craziness or just follow along with it?

Burko-E-0: I admire your deeeeep thoughts.

Zongo: (blinking one full minute at the tar shimmering along the beach) Well I guess.

One late morning after the thirtieth playing of the Zongo-0-0-0! tape, Burko-E-0 died in the springless chair, spilling coffee all over his t-shirt image of himself leaning ever backwards in that same, famous chair. All his fans were shattered and Zongo tried to take the following day off in his grief, but the youngest vice-president wrote a tribute to Burko-E-0 and insisted only Zongo could read it. So Zongo read it the following morning while another vice-president substituted in the control room.

Of course he could never get the timing right as to when to slap in the "Zongo-0-0-0!" tape and Zongo told him to forget it.

When the new engineer came aboard, he was forever a beat

behind and seemed put-upon and angry behind his polished glasses whenever Zongo fed him the cue: "I'm starting to feel a teensy teensy teensy little bit unearthly." More than once Zongo saw only kneecaps when Burko-E-0's chair proved difficult for the flustered engineer.

Zongo, depressed, took to trying to mouth the Zongo-0-0-0! effect himself but emails poured in protesting, and the three youngest vice-presidents had a meeting with Zongo and the engineer, Mr. Claude Snarrel, wherein Snarrel promised to try to be more reasonable in exchange for a new chair. The vice-presidents pronounced TRIPLE-LOVELY, especially since the ad agency wanted to reshoot a tape of Zongo in earphones, turning and turning to twist the chord around his body, and then corkscrewing back to unwind it, with his transported face satanic at the end--the very famous bit he had done only once since Snarrel's debut. The final upshot of the meeting was that the engineer agreed to slap the tape in with more alacrity.

Which he did. But with a quicker malice behind his polished eyeglasses which ruined the timing of Zongo's other jokes and routines, and, worse, put his delivery of commercials for Mad Jack's Furniture Outlets off. Mad Jack himself called a vice-president: "I want, whatchacallit, energy!"

Whereupon the vice-presidents clowned "Whatchacallit energy!"

Whatchacallit energy! Whatchacallit energy!" actually doing a sort of tribal dance, but in the cafeteria this time since Claude Snarrel, unlike the lamented Burko-E-0, locked the control room door. The vice-presidents were usually buttoned-up, pinched-in, and polished, but experienced a mood swing after the mid-morning delivery of small packages by a one-eyed Mexican.

But what Zongo could mouth whenever Claude Snarrel missed the cue was what the vice-presidents repeatedly sneered at the locked control room door: "The Engineer!" Soon that expression permeated the humid town, and when Billy Lawler decided to take more than the allotted time to really tune up a shabby Escort at BAYFRONT FORD-MAZDA, his colleagues chorused "The Engineer! The Engineer! The Engineer!"

The effect was that Snarrel became almost as famous as had been Burko-E-0, and the art department began designing a mean-faced t-shirt, but Snarrel caught wind and threatened suit, whereupon Zongo went to the cowardly, forty-ish vice-president to get permission to fire him. "You don't sue your family!" finally won the argument.

So the next morning after his final high-C "Uh-uh-uh-uh-UNEARTHLY!" signoff, Zongo pounded on the control room door for five minutes while staring up through a filthy skylight at

patches of mercury sky, and hearing muffled sounds of tortured metal from the not quite soundproof interior. When Zongo finally was admitted by the engineer, shiny glasses slipping down from his pale forehead, a large round spring rolled into the center of the room. Snarrel had been trying to load the spring into Burko-E-O's chair.

"How you making it, man? I been, like whatchacallit, fuckin knocking? You're fired. Hey but you're a tall mother you know that? I mean we can't work together you know what I mean? Like no... chemistry? It's fuckin UN-unearthly! You know what I mean?" Claude Snarrel reddened and stared at the lying-down chair. "Life's a bitch and then you die" Zongo informed him. "C'est la"...and here he wheeled and started skipping away..."shit!"

But the instant he swivelled his head back to note the effect of his farewell smirk on the engineer, he caught instead the last of the scarlet rush of Snarrel, the famous chair now coming down out of a snowy travel poster.

The next thing Zongo knew was nothing, although two vice-presidents would later dance around the body making levitating motions while projecting mantras out through the open door. Inside the studio, earphones askew, Claude Snarrel slowly revolved, twisting the chord around himself and snapping his

fingers more rapidly than anybody could have believed.